

## **DEQ APPROVES UPGRADE OF POWER LINE BETWEEN GREAT FALLS, HAVRE**

*By Karl Puckett*

Major improvements are planned along a deteriorating 74-year-old electricity transmission line between Great Falls and Havre, state and federal officials said Monday.

"It'll keep the lights on," Tom Ring of the state Department of Environmental Quality, said of the upgrades.

A secondary benefit of the upgrade is it could increase capacity for future wind development, said Sam Miller of the Western Area Power Administration, which owns the line.

WAPA is a federal agency that markets power generated at federal facilities, such the hydroelectric dams on the Missouri River.

Cross arms for the line, which were constructed in 1934, are rotting, and it has no lightning protection, Ring said.

"This is a reliability project primarily," he said.

The improvements, Ring said, meet the standards of the state's Major Facility Siting Act and can move forward.

The power line is the backbone of the transmission system along the Hi-Line, Miller said.

Wooden H-frames will be replaced along 103 miles between Great Falls and Havre.

WAPA plans rebuild the line along the existing alignment except for eight proposed reroutes, Ring said. For example, the current route goes over the track and field facility in Box Elder, but the new route goes around it.

"Land-uses have changed," Ring said.

The purpose of the upgrade is to make sure WAPA can meet its load obligations, Miller said.

While the old line is being upgraded, its 161-kilovolt capacity will be increased to 230, just in case the extra space is needed in the future.

The larger line could serve as an interconnect for wind developers seeking access to the federal high-voltage transmission system, he said.

Wind farm developers say their plans are constrained because there's not enough room on existing power lines.

A lack of transmission capacity in the state has prompted a Canadian company to propose construction of a 230-mile line between Great Falls and Lethbridge. That project has not received final approval, but wind farm developers already have secured all of its capacity.

The work will proceed based on the availability of materials and funding, and could take up to take up to 10 years to complete, Miller said.

The work includes removing a substation on the Missouri River near Rainbow Dam outside of Great Falls. It will be replaced with a new transformer about a one mile up the hill adjacent to the NorthWestern Power substation.

Miller said the transformer should not be so close to the river in the event of oil leaks.